

Studio One

Volume 45

Article 39

2021

Nighthawks

Robin Buchanan
Denver, CO

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/studio_one



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buchanan, Robin (2021) "Nighthawks," *Studio One*: Vol. 45, 58-61.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/studio_one/vol45/iss1/39

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studio One by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

Nighthawks

You have to leave the protest early to cover your nightshift. Several black lives matter community leaders were arrested last night in their own homes. Upwards of 100 people show up at the capitol. It feels like a lot. It feels like too little. When you clock in, Jen flaunts her managerial power by yelling at you for not having a solid color mask. No one is coming into the store right now and she demands you not sit still anyways. You restock the cups. Your coworkers make fun of a doordash workers accent as he orders on the intercom.

By seven you're back in the rhythm of it, order, drinks, cash out, order, drinks, cash out. You ignore the tightening feeling in your chest. A car comes by with a kitten in the backseat. All your coworkers gather to see. A frazzled looking man walks up to the window, voice barely audible. He says he's homeless and has been walking all day. He asks for one taco and tries to offer a lottery ticket in exchange. Jen doesn't let you serve him. A lovely woman has a corgi. He's sitting in the front of her car, and drives for the drink when you hand it out. She lets you pet him. You smile, and then she hands you a platinum mastercard that says Blue Lives Matter.

It's nine, and you haven't gotten your thirty yet. It's just you and Seanray working the whole line. The parking lot is packed seven cars out. Seanray says he was sleeping in the skate park last night, and he saw griffons perching on the roof of buildings. He laughs, that barking laugh he has that's loud and little jarring. He says he knows they weren't really griffons there. But there was something big and crouching, and he doesn't know what. It vexes him. You don't believe in griffons, but when you look out the dark window in between cars, you think you see them too, lurching in the shadows of the parking lot, waiting diligently under the cameras. You feel like you're being watched.

A group of teenagers rolls up to the window, drunk. They're fraternity age. None of them wear masks. They complain about the wait when you fold over and seal the bag and put it in a plastic tin and hand it out with gloves according to the new company policy. You think of your grandfather, and how you were in the same room with him just yesterday. A single middle aged man takes his food from you, takes one look in the bag, and flips you off. You don't know what you did wrong. He drives off before you can ask.

You haven't looked at the clock for a while now, but when you get the chance too, it says 23:04. It's in military time, you see. It takes you a moment to do the mental gymnastics. First minus two, then ten-eleven o'clock. You give the last car in line their food and they drive off. It's empty for once, and Seanray, who was working the line, peels of his gloves and breathes a sigh of relief. You look at your phone and learn from a twitter notification that Ruth Bader Ginsburg died three hours ago. You go to eat a small bag of apples and honey you brought to work. They're soaked through, the honey is water now. She's dead, and your chest is just two plates that are slowly being cracked open, every day something else stuffed into the gap.

Just when you start to sit down, another car pulls in. A doordash order of over \$120 worth of food. It takes you thirty minutes to make it. You warn all the cars behind them. An elderly drunk hispanic man is a regular. He comes this time every Friday and orders a tostada. You tell him for the third time they are discontinued, and he orders something else, asking for salt packets. You don't have a salt packet in the whole restaurant, so you just stuff his bag with sauces in apology. He fistbumps you at the window. The same middle aged man from earlier comes back. He does not order. He simply drives through the line both middle fingers out the window. Trish-- was it Trish working line?-- laughs and says "Fuck him, it will move our times up." You look out the window. The twin headlights of

approaching cars seem to stretch out into infinity, like when you face two mirrors towards each other. You look at the clock, it says 26:42. You don't bother with the math.

There's a long black party limo, and it pulls up to the drive thru, the last window wheeling down. Jeff Bezos is inside, laughing in a half conversation with a friend. You tell him his total is 30.78. He hands you a credit card, not even looking at you, instead sharing in some kind of joke they're all having. "Take this," he says, pulling a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet, offering it up between two fingers. "Buy yourself something." He smiles. He is feeling generous. He's having a good night. A wave of nausea blasts through you with every beat drop of whatever party song is playing. The limo drives off, blaring music into the dark.

You step outside into the dark, street lit alleyway behind the employee door. Trish is there, and she offers you a cigarette. You wave it away. You already feel like you can't breathe. In the far distance, you can hear the sirens, the sound of gunshots and the hiss of tear gas canisters. You wonder if they're still at the capitol or closer. Your brain dances with the graphic images of social media posts you're sure you'll wake up to tomorrow morning. The griffons are still waiting by the security camera, their yellow eyes boring into your head, daring you to move.

"I'm sick of Seanray," Trish says, coughing. "I'm gonna tell Jen to stop scheduling him at night. They've got to transfer his ass. If he's working, I don't wanna be here."

"Yeah" You echo, sipping your water.

"He's so creepy, always saying he loves me, Jen's gotta transfer his ass to another store or I'm putting in my two weeks, I'm gonna go work at the Taco Bell on Sheridan."

"He had a bottle of vodka on the employee drinks window the other day" You offer. "Not even trying to hide it anymore."

"He could get fired for that shit" Trish complains. "Don't know

why Jen keeps hiring these assholes.” Jen was desperate. “I’m twice his age.” She huffs. Seanray was also desperate. You’re not really talking about anything. The distant chants of protestors echo, and then the drive thru bell rings, drowning them out with its pure, insistent ding. Trish sighs, putting out her cigarette on the wall. And you head back into the glaring light of the store.

“When are we closing?” You ask. The clock reads 13:67. You have class tomorrow. No one answers. You’re alone. The middle aged man comes to flip you off one last time. You go to lift your fingers and mimic him, but he’s already gone. There’s three minutes till close. And then the last car of the night rolls in. Ruth Bader Ginsburg comes up to the drive thru. She’s in a red honda. She’s young, like in her movie, on the basis of sex, or the old black and white photos you’ve seen. She orders a single glass of wine. You hand it to her, and she doesn’t say anything, just giving a soft sort of smile, and then driving into the street. Her car is immediately hit by a truck.

You’re closed now, and you’re on dishes. The new sanitation spray comes out red. It’s thick, and difficult to clean with, staining the dishes. You’ve got your bluetooth headphones on, on a YouTube playlist. You work as fast as you can. You want to get home. You think the liquid might be wine. You soak the dishes in it, scrubbing off hours of beans and beef and dirt and mud. Everything in the sink turns red. The color gets on your hands, under your fingernails. You don’t notice your headphones stopped playing music a while ago. You don’t remember coming home.

Robin Buchanan
Denver, CO